After discovering that practicing law left a lot to be desired, Pauline M. Aranas turned to a career in law librarianship and has never looked back. “My time as a part-time student worker in the University of California (UC) Berkeley Law Library put me in constant contact with Bob Berring, who was the law library director at the time,” said Aranas. “Bob was so passionate about being a law librarian and was so inspiring; he really became one of my early mentors.” After completing her MLIS, Aranas got word of an open position at the University of Southern California (USC) Law Library (her law school alma mater) and decided to apply. “It was like coming home—I had the opportunity to work for the late, great Albert Brecht and with the amazing Frank Houdek and Tory Trotta; people who really have a strong passion for the profession,” Aranas said.

After a year serving as a reference librarian, Aranas was promoted to head of public services as technology continues to change and law librarians are being asked to develop more thorough methods of training, Pauline M. Aranas, past-chair of the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Awards Committee, says it’s more important than ever to keep up with continuing education and the latest legal news, and to stay connected with your peers.
at USC before becoming an assistant and later associate director of the law library. “Each new position increased my managerial experience, but after 10 years, I started to get solicitations for directorships and after a lot of careful thought and consideration, decided to leave my friends and family in California and try something new,” she said. Aranas accepted a position at Vanderbilt Law School as law library director, a position she held for eight years. Shortly after leaving Vanderbilt, she accepted an associate law librarian position at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA), before returning to USC to serve in a law school administrative capacity as chief operating officer. She returned to the law library as deputy director a few years later and when Brecht decided to step down from his position, Aranas was appointed into her current position as director of the law library.

An AALL member since 1984, Aranas has been active in several committees, including the Nominations Committee, Scholarship Committee, Mentoring Committee, and as past-chair of the Awards Committee. She is also a past president of the Southern California Association of Law Libraries, and is a member of several special interest sections (SIS), including Academic Law Libraries SIS, Computing Services SIS, and the Research Instruction & Patron Services SIS.

We spoke with the California native about recent advancements in legal technology and what the future holds, as well as the value associations can provide, both educationally and professionally.

What inspired your career path?
In my youth, I was pretty clueless about what I wanted to do. I worked part-time as a student library assistant at the UCLA library while I was obtaining my Bachelor’s in film and television from UCLA. After graduation, I didn’t really know what I wanted to do, but I decided to apply to law school at USC and thankfully got accepted. However, I didn’t have a long-term desire to be a lawyer, and I wasn’t happy trying to work through the practice of law. Not long after I graduated law school, I was at a point where I wasn’t terribly happy where things were going and after talking with a very close friend, who was a librarian, I decided to go to library school and get my MLIS. I had worked in a library while I was attending college at UCLA, so I was familiar with the library profession. I also thought an MLIS would provide me with some different career options.

On my first day of school at UC Berkeley I was talking to the associate dean, who said, “You have a law degree, why don’t you go down to the law school and talk to Bob Berring,” who was the director of the law library. After talking with Bob, I landed a part-time job working in the law library, which really set me on course to pursue law librarianship as a career.

How do you stay abreast of changes in the field?
It really is a challenge and can be somewhat overwhelming. The major way I stay connected is through my network of contacts that I have made over the years. I also attend a lot of conferences, whether through AALL or other related programs through the Association of American Law Schools and The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction. I also attend meetings outside of law librarianship.

“The generosity of the people in our profession—their willingness to share their experience and ideas—is so beneficial and I value it a lot.” Pauline M. Aranas

PAULINE M. ARANAS

- ASSOCIATE DEAN
- JOHN STAUFFER CHARITABLE TRUST CIO
- DIRECTOR OF THE LAW LIBRARY
- UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, GABRIEL AND MATILDA BARNETT INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY CENTER & THE ASA V. CALL LAW LIBRARY
- LOS ANGELES, CA
I find that attending educational programming and talking with my peers and colleagues helps affirm my knowledge within the profession and also offers fresh perspectives that can be very beneficial. The generosity of the people in our profession— their willingness to share their experience and ideas—is so beneficial and I value it a lot. The other thing I try to do is follow certain blogs, whether it's a law librarian blog such as 3 Geeks or Dewey B Strategic or other law-related blogs. I have also found AALL's daily newsletter KnowItAALL to be extremely helpful with its variety of news posting and snippets.

How has participation in AALL impacted your career and/or leadership capabilities?
It's played a significant role—the experience I have from serving on committees has really helped hone my leadership skills because you're working with a broad range of people. I also like that my committee work always has an initiative to work toward; it's different than when you're in a particular work environment where perhaps if you have a managerial role you can delegate tasks to people. On a committee, you're demonstrating a different type of leadership and working with peers from all different library types with vastly different skill sets. This type of work forces me to refine my leadership and communication skills.

I also value all the amazing connections I have made since becoming a member of AALL. The Association has allowed me to engage with others—I find that so often as a librarian, there aren't a whole lot of people I can talk to about my work without eyes glazing over, so it's exciting to talk with people who are just as excited and passionate about the work I do. Throughout my career, I've developed networks where I've received a lot of helpful advice, and I can turn to these people if I have a particular question I need help answering. I have also found a lot of educational value in my membership, both in staying abreast of changes within the field, but also in learning and developing tools I can implement at my own institution.

How has information technology changed since you entered the industry?
I'm going to date myself, but it's changed enormously. I started working in libraries during the age of the card catalog. I remember as a law student and later as a law librarian when we had the Lexis computer, which was housed in a large piece of furniture in a locked room and accessible by appointment. The changes since that time have been massive. We all now heavily rely on smartphones and other devices to manage our daily lives. It's definitely been a series of fascinating and dramatic changes since I started my professional career.

Are there ways in which you think technology could be better adopted and taught in law schools?
I don't have a magic solution, but what works at my institution is being surrounded by a strong team. I work with great teams, including an information technology team who has a strong understanding of the infrastructure and technology needed for legal education. They are very thoughtful about what faculty, staff, and students need to work in this educational environment. My team of librarians also loves to experiment with new technologies. It seems to me that when people experiment and try something new, they are usually enthusiastic to share their experience with others.

Law schools are notoriously slow to adopt technology, so it's typically a gradual process. When trying something new, the most
important thing is to have support behind the initiative, people who will aid in getting the resources or technology that's needed. In order for students to adopt new technology, you first need to show them how they can apply it and then assist with training.

How do you envision the future of law librarianship and the legal information profession?

I don’t see any major fundamental changes taking place. The fundamentals of being a law librarian and legal information professional won’t change. We are still managing, acquiring, and providing information to our students, attorneys, patrons, etc., and that hasn’t changed. What is changing is the process: how we deliver our services and what services we do deliver. We’ve already started seeing these changes in some areas of private and academic institutions. For example, some academic entities manage institutional repositories. In the private sector, a number of librarians have expanded their roles in terms of records and knowledge management. Fundamentally we still live and work with information, but the process for how we manage and deliver that information has changed and will continue to change.

What basic skills should attorneys today possess?

There is a lot of discussion nowadays about attorney competency and what skills attorneys should possess. There are a number of studies that have been released, and recently the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System created foundations for legal practice. There are obvious skills such as analysis and reasoning, judgment, communication and writing skills, and researching the law. However, there are softer skills that many of these studies report on that are equally important for young attorneys to master. For instance, problem-solving skills, listening skills, people skills, professionalism, and having a really strong work ethic. These are all skills that a number of studies and commentators have articulated are important in the practice of law.

Academia is undergoing its own analysis of this, and librarians are now engaged in developing learning outcomes for our institutions. It’s important to assess what you want your students to learn and what skills they should learn. Determine what the foundational skills are and what roles we as educators play in developing, teaching, and measuring those skills.

What changes do you anticipate the information technology field will experience in the next 5 to 10 years?

I think one of the biggest changes is in the area of Artificial Intelligence (AI). There have been major developments in that field already, and I think we will be seeing even more changes very soon. We have already seen AI’s impact in the area of e-discovery and many people are tracking what developments the ROSS system will have on legal professionals. As AI impacts the legal profession, it will trickle down and impact those of us who are educating lawyers. I think many of us are looking at how AI will impact how we do our work moving forward, as well as its impact on the systems we currently use.

What career advice would you give to newer law librarians?

Try to be flexible and adaptable. Don’t be afraid to try something new, even if it doesn’t work out, come back to it and make some different efforts. It's also important to be involved professionally with your local and national associations, both from an educational standpoint as well as for networking. Also, be sure you understand your institution’s mission and goals—both short- and long-term, and how you can add value.

Lastly, don’t be afraid to show initiative regarding a potential new procedure or process. Sometimes your suggestions may or may not be accepted, but thinking about things in a different way will help you discover more about the role you play within your institution. Further, your idea may be something you can come back to and implement down the road when things begin to shift.